

The Children in the Wood.

OR THE Norfolk Gentleman's Last Will and Testament.



The father left his little son,
As plainly doth appear,
When he to perfect age should come,
Three hundred pounds a year.

And to his little daughter Jane,
Six hundred pounds in gold,
To be paid on the marriage-day,
Which might not be controul'd.
But if these children chanc'd to die,
Ere they to age did come,
Their uncle should possess their wealth,
For so the will did run.



Now, brother, said the dying-man,
Look to my children dear,
Be kind unto my boy and girl,
No friend else have they here,
To God and you I recommend
My children dear this day;
But little time we have, 'tis sure,
Within this world to stay.

You must be father and mother both,
And uncle all in one:
God knows what will become of them
When we are dead and gone.
And thus bespoke the mother dear,
Oh! brother kind, quoth she,
You are the man must bring our babes
To wealth or misery.

And if you keep them carefully,
Then God will you reward;
But if you otherwise should deal,
God will your deeds regard.
With lips as cold as any stone,
They kiss'd their children small;
God bless you both, our children dear,
Then down the tears did fall.

These speeches then the brother spake
To this sick couple there:
The keeping of your children small,
Dear sister, do not fear.
God never prosper me nor mine,
Nor ought else that I have,
If I do wrong your children dear,
When you are laid in grave.

The parents being dead and gone,
The children home he takes,
And brings them strait into his house,
Where much of them he makes.
He had not kept these pretty babes
A twelvemonth and a day,
But for their wealth he did devise
To take their lives away.



He bargain'd with two ruffians strong,
Who were of furious mood,
That they should take these children
And slay them in a wood.
Then told his wife and all he had,
He did the children send,
For to be brought up in fair London,
With one that was his friend.

Away then went these pretty babes,
Rejoicing at that tide,
Rejoicing with a merry mood,
They should on horseback ride:
They prate and prattle pleasantly,
As they rode on the way,
To those that should their butchers be,
And work their lives decay.

So that the pretty speech they made,
Made murderers' hearts relent,

And they who undertook the deed,
Still sorely did repent.
Yet one of them, most hard of heart,
Did vow to do his charge,
Because the wretch that hired him,
Had paid him very large.

The other won't hereto agree,
So here they fell to strife,
And then together they did fight
About the children's life.
And he that was of mildest mood
Did slay the other there,
Within an unfrequented wood,
While babes did quake for fear.



He took the children by the hand,
While tears stood in their eyes,
And bid them straitway follow him,
And see they did not cry.
And two long miles he led them then,
While they for bread complain.
Stay here, quoth he, I'll bring you bread
When I come back again.



These pretty babes went hand in hand,
And wander'd up and down;
But never more did see the man
Approaching from the town.
Their pretty lips with blackberries
Were all besmear'd and dy'd,
And when they saw the darksome night
They sat them down and cry'd.

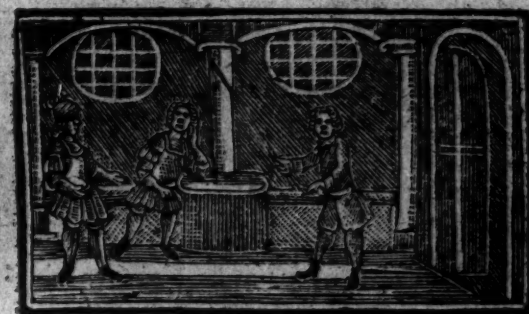
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Thus wander'd these two pretty babes,
Till death did end their grief,
In one another's arms they died,
As babes wanting relief.
No burial these pretty babes
Of any man receives,
Till Robin-red-breasts painfully
Did cover them with leaves.

And now the heavy wrath of God
Upon their uncle fell,
Yea friendly fiends did haunt his house:
His conscience felt an Hell.
His barns were fir'd, his house consum'd,
His lands were barren made,
His cattle died within the field,
And nothing with him stay'd.

And in a voyage to Portugal
Two of his sons did die,
And to conclude himself was brought
To want and misery.
He pawn'd and mortgaged his land
Ere seven years were out,
So now at length this wicked deed
By this means was found out.

The fellow that did take in hand
The children for to kill,
Was for a murder judg'd to die,
As was God's blessed will.
He did confess the very truth
The which is here express'd.
Their uncle died when he for debt
Did long in prison rest.
You that executors be made,
And overseers eke,



Of children that be fatherless,
And infants mild and meek,
Take you example by this thing,
And yield to each his right,
Left God for such-like cruelty,
Your wicked minds requite.